The SPS Connection

July/August 2006

Save the Date!
2007 SPS Users Conference
Feb. 26 – Mar. 2, 2007
Mark your calendars now!

SPS Increment 3 Moves Into Testing

In the 10 years that the Standard Procurement System has been in development and deployment, the software for the program has undergone many changes—from correcting bugs to adding the Adapter making interfacing with other systems possible. In making these changes and upgrades, SPS has traveled the road of testing and changing that most successful software programs travel (e.g., Windows 95 and Windows XP).

But perhaps no change that the system has gone through to date is as dramatic as the one it is expected to undergo next— between Increment 2, currently in use by nearly 23,000 DoD personnel, and Increment 3, the much-talked-about next "iteration" of the software.

Read Full Article

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Read Full Article

Colonel's Corner

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Managing the Change to Increment 3

Or, How the Army is Learning to Stop Resisting Change and Love the New SPS

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Desk Officer Profiles

Mr. George Chavis-U.S. Army

How many years have you been an SPS Desk Officer? How many years have you been in the procurement world?

I have been in the contracting career field since June 1993; I have been in the role of "Desk Officer" since October 2000.

What would you say your greatest accomplishment or proudest moment has been as an SPS Desk Officer?

Read Full Article ⬈

A Closer Look: SPS in the Army

In the 15 years that the Standard Procurement System has been in development, many of the diverse communities that comprise the Department of Defense—the largest and most complex organization on the planet—have implemented the system in an effort to continually improve the software through better understanding how the system operates in a real environment. Throughout that journey, SPS has constantly taken feedback from its users to continually improve itself, bringing the program to where it is today—poised to take a leap into cyberspace and beyond the hopes originally expressed for the product.

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Classes and events can do much to improve the way you work. Some upcoming informative programs include:

ADAPT 2006: Seamlessly Transform Your Acquisition & Procurement Strategies to Ensure Success in Every Assignment

Date/Location:
July 18–19, 2006/Westin Arlington Hotel, Arlington, VA

Read Full Article ⬈

Change is coming! The SPS Connection will soon be getting a facelift. Send us your suggestions for improvements. Thanks to everyone who participated in our recent logo survey! Your input is helping to guide current branding efforts.

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But perhaps no change that the system has gone through to date is as dramatic as the one it is expected to undergo next —between Increment 2, currently in use by nearly 23,000 DoD personnel, and Increment 3, the much-talked-about next "iteration" of the software. In Increment 3, the program will incorporate many changes that will bring it in line with other benchmark business systems in use in corporations, government agencies, and organizations around the world.

SPS Increment 3 will move the program from a desktop-based application to an Internet-powered database accessible from anywhere in the world. With a host of new capabilities, such as archiving and a flexible, data-based structure that allows users to change forms without re-entering data, Increment 3 is poised to put procurement at DoD firmly in the new millennium.

On its way to becoming a reality, the SPS-JPMO is pleased to announce the testing schedule for the new software. Allowing for both additional training time for users and testing time for the JPMO, the new schedule promises to help DoD develop the best product possible and implement it as smoothly as possible.

Anticipated Testing and Deployment Schedule

-Government Verification & Validation Testing (GV&V) – August - September, 2006

-System Acceptance Testing – November - December, 2006

-Pilot Site Deployments – Second Quarter 2007

As SPS continues to evolve, user feedback is extremely important. Your comments and questions help us to advance and improve the software so that it can work better in your everyday environment. If you have questions or concerns about the current software or the upcoming Increment 3, please contact the Desk Officer for your service branch, listed under "SPS Desk Officers" in this newsletter. They are equipped to help you work through software issues and can bring your concerns directly to the SPS-JPMO.

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Or, How the Army is Learning to Stop Resisting Change and Love the New SPS

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Doyle has made it his personal mission to ensure that this natural component of human behavior will have as little impact on Army procurement staff as possible, and that the Army's changeover to Increment 3 will be smooth. His method? Change management. His crew? The Planning Increment 3 Team (PITT).

Since humans are complicated creatures—and we are all filled with an abundance of non-scientific and non-quantifiable stuff called emotions—changing over to Increment 3 has just as much to do with psychology as it does with polishing the software. (Although this, too, is a component of PITT's approach.)

PITT comprises a group of technical and functional decision-makers from such groups as the Army Corps of Engineers, the Army Contracting Agency's various regions, and Medical Research & Materiel Command. With Doyle at its helm, PITT has implemented a strategy aimed at allaying the fears of SPS users. The team is responsible for integrating technical, functional, testing, and deployment programs.

One of the main methods is communication. "The more you know about Increment 3 and what it can do to make your life easier, the more you'll look forward to it," says Kevin. "And, of course, the more you'll get out of it." Methods of communication include e-mails, items posted in The SPS Center of Excellence (http://www.spscoe.sps.eis.army.mil) and Army Knowledge
Online (http://www.army.mil/ako) as well as, this newsletter (back issues:
http://www.spscoe.sps.eis.army.mil/spsconnection/archives.htm).

This is not to say that PITT's role is entirely warm and fuzzy. Easing people into Increment 3 will not work unless the software is as solid, powerful, and intuitive as users need it to be. To ensure Increment 3 has the features procurement officers need, PITT has devised a way to elicit more feedback from the testers JPMO uses in its trials. Specifically, each of the Army personnel involved will make informal 20- to 30-minute presentations to the functional pyramid points of contact. The topics will be on one very specific aspect of Increment 3 to which he or she was assigned, something specifically related to his or her area of expertise. Each month there will be a different presentation topic "theme." One month might feature awards, another vendors, etc. Presenters will talk about which improvements were most helpful, what worked well, and what needs more attention before release. The next round of JPMO tests begins July 31.

Another key part of PITT's change management program is more "behind the scenes." As PITT takes tester feedback and leverages their Increment 3 knowledge for the Army's deployment strategies, it is reassessing the Army's timeline, arranging additional user tests, and organizing future pilot sites. In addition, as part of an Army-wide mandate to reduce the number of servers, PITT is coordinating the changeover from about 300 servers to approximately 12 large servers and nearly 80 blade servers.

This server consolidation will allow for faster procurement operations. In addition, software updates will take less time, they will be less complex, and maintenance needs will be reduced.

When all is said and done, and all of the Army is taking advantage of Increment 3's power and useful features, it is likely that PITT's role will have been forgotten by the users. It will be much like we now ask ourselves, "How on earth did we live without the Internet?!" Doyle doesn't mind being "forgotten" in this way. In fact, he will take it as a compliment to PITT: "When the procurement officers are so excited about getting Increment 3 they forget their worries? And when they are so thrilled with it that they don't know how they did without it?" says Doyle. "We've done our job."

Kevin Doyle, IT Specialist, Army Contracting Agency

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Welcoming Shay Assad
DoD Appoints a New Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy

For his entire career, Shay Assad has been interconnected with the Warfighter. In fact, his first venture was as a naval officer. When he graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1972—with distinction—he served two tours of duty aboard Navy destroyers. Shortly thereafter, he became a Naval Procurement Officer at the Naval Sea Systems Command. He was responsible for negotiating and administering the engineering and production contracts for Aegis Weapons Systems.

It was at this time he realized he had a passion for the procurement field. This enthusiasm and aptitude would culminate in his recent appointment as Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, where he is responsible for all acquisition and policy matters in the DoD.

"Right from the beginning of my career, the importance of ensuring that our Warfighters get the equipment they need in a timely way was paramount to me," says Assad.

Although Assad left the Navy in 1978, his relationship with the Warfighter continued. It was at this time that he joined Raytheon Company in its largest Electronics and Missile divisions. Through his 22-year tenure with Raytheon, Assad held contract management positions of increasing responsibility, gaining considerable knowledge in defense, commercial, and international contracting with his involvement in the most advanced technologies. His responsibilities grew: in 1997 he oversaw $20 billion in contract negotiation and administration activities in the gamut of Raytheon businesses, government and commercial. He was also charged with numerous program and business management special assignments company-wide. By the time he retired from the company, in 2000, this former Navy Warfighter was Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Raytheon's $2.7 billion international engineering and construction business.

Not one to rest on his laurels, in 2001 Assad began a small business that provided consulting and retail services. However, in June 2004, he felt the desire to serve the Warfighter once again, returning to public service as a civilian in the position of Assistant Deputy Commandant, Installations and Logistics (Contracts) within the Marine Corps.

While his current title is Director, Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy, his role goes well beyond. Assad is the principal advisor to the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology as well as the Defense Acquisition Board. His advisory role includes topics on acquisition and procurement strategies for all major weapon systems programs, major automated information systems programs, and services acquisitions. His duties include procurement/sourcing functional business process requirements in the DoD's Business Enterprise Architecture and Enterprise Transition Plan. He is also the advisor for competition, source selection, multi-year contracting, warranties, leasing, and all international contracting matters.

"Throughout my career, I have always admired the men and women who serve our great country. It is a privilege to be among them" he says.

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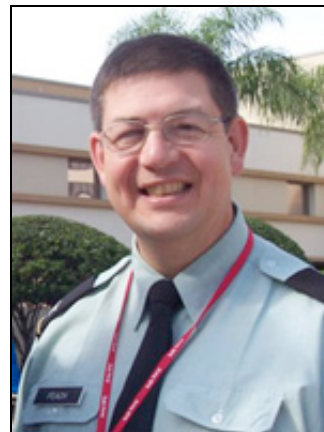
BTA Update

The Defense Business Transformation Agency (BTA) and the Defense Business Systems Acquisition Executive (DBSAE) organizations continue to staff up and develop a robust support structure for the initial acquisition programs moving under DBSAE management. As of 30 May 2006, SPS Operational Control transferred from PEO EIS to BTA with a complete transfer as of 1 October 2006. You can continue to learn about the changes on the BTA web site at http://www.dod.mil/bta/ and on the SPS Center of Excellence (COE) at http://www.spscoe.sps.eis.army.mil/spscoe/.

2007 SPS Joint Users' Conference

We're ready to convene our conference planning committee to solicit Component input for our second Joint Users' Conference. We'll be in Denver at the Adam's Mark Hotel from February 26 – March 2. To help us plan an agenda that will help you do your job and continue your professional growth, let us know your thoughts on the conference-speakers, workshop content, panels, hands-on displays, or anything else you'd like to see. You can write directly to us through Center of Excellence or *The SPS Connection*, our work through your Component Desk Officer. The Desk Officers will be represented on the conference planning committee.

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Tips & Tricks

FPDS-NG - The Big Picture

As we embark on implementation of the Federal Procurement Data System – Next Generation (FPDS-NG) it may be helpful to step back and consider the core reasons for making this radical change in the way we document and report information about the dollars we obligate through our procurement systems.

For many years Federal agencies, particularly DoD, have been publicly criticized for their inability to accurately account for how they spend taxpayer dollars. We in DoD never seem to balance our books and to obtain what accountants call, a "clean financial audit".   There have been many attempts to remedy the problems. The "Paperless by 2000" initiative was largely driven by the need to leverage information technology to achieve financial accountability. In early 2001, the "President's Management Agenda" outlined an aggressive strategy for improving the management of the Federal government. A primary goal of this agenda is Improved Financial Performance which includes not only accurate accounting of the taxpayers' money but the ability to provide government managers timely and accurate program cost information.

As GAO recently emphasized, DoD procurement information is neither accurate nor timely and therefore of limited use to support tactical business decisions or strategic planning. The paper DD350 process often took months for information to work its way up through contracting divisions, activities, commands, service components, DoD and finally to OMB. Due in part to the fact that DD350s were often regarded as an annoying task to be done after an award, our reports were not only late but notoriously inaccurate.
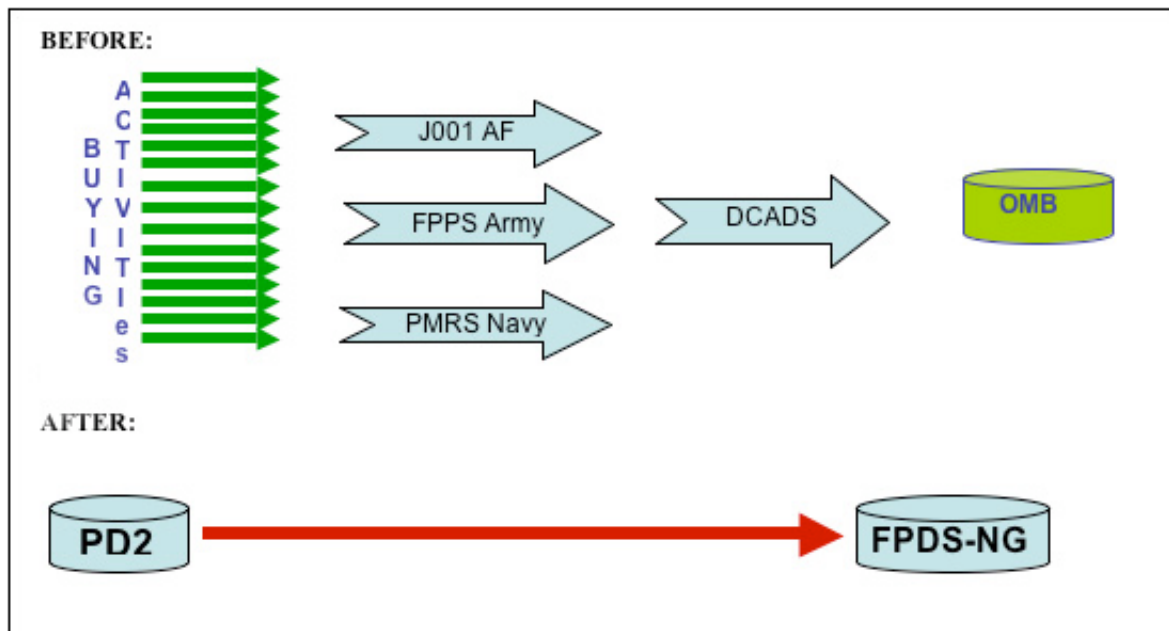
Helpful Websites

FPDS-NG Web site –
www.fpds.gov

SPS Center of Excellence –
www.spscoe.sps.eis.army.mil

Defense Acquisition
University – www.dau.mil

Business Transformation
Agency – www.dod.mil/bta

OMB worked closely with GSA and the services to develop a system whereby both timeliness and accuracy would be greatly improved through automation and electronic record submittal. To ensure compliance, timeliness, and data integrity, with few exceptions the FPDS-NG "Contract Action Report" (CAR) must be finalized *before* an award can be released in SPS. To help ensure accuracy, much of the report data will automatically be populated from PD2 and other contract preparation systems. CAR data fields not having corresponding fields within a contract instrument (e.g. extent competed) are filled in online directly by the contract specialist. To further facilitate accuracy, a CAR cannot be finalized until it passes many edit checks and synchronized with the electronic award at which time the CAR is said to be "authenticated".

To ensure that the data in the CAR is consistent with the contract data, once the CAR is authenticated the "approved" award must be released without any changes. If for any reason the award is unapproved (which would allow it to be edited), the CAR is automatically unauthenticated. The CAR will then have to be re-authenticated before a re-approved award can be released. The authentication process will run the edit checks and synchronize the data between the award and the CAR.

FPDS-NG opens the way to accurate, near real-time data reporting for contracts government wide. Since it is web based and available to the public, it helps meet an additional presidential management objective of ensuring that the Federal Government's $60 billion annual investment in information technology significantly improves the government's ability to serve citizens. Indeed, universities, Congress and the average taxpayer can log in and run any number of standard and custom reports from FPDS-NG for free. We should note that, for security purposes, DoD data will not be available to the general public until 90 days after award.

FPDS-NG holds great promise for enabling DoD to reconcile its books and greatly improve our financial accountability. It also provides unprecedented visibility into the business of federal procurement. The entire system relies on our willingness to learn to use this new tool effectively. Please take advantage of the numerous training resources available to you. If you have any questions about this new reporting process please contact your desk officer or e-mail us here at The SPS Connection.

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A Closer Look: SPS in the Army

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For this piece, we're taking a closer look at just one of the communities that has helped to push SPS farther than any other standardized business system at the Department—the United States Army.

Go Army

Established to fight and win our nation's wars through prompt, sustained land dominance, the U.S. Army is today comprised of approximately one million men and women in active duty and reserve forces. With sustained operations currently in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other locations around the world, the U.S. Army forms the largest military operation in existence. It is responsible for peacekeeping missions, humanitarian efforts, and wartime strategy. With such a large, diverse, and widely spread population carrying responsibility for some of the most critical tasks on the planet, the U.S. Army needs resources delivered in prompt fashion to remote locations day-in and day-out. SPS is helping to refine this process.

SPS Enters

Since 1999, nearly 9,000 contracting officers, buyers, and contract specialists—both civilians and soldiers—have used SPS in the Army to purchase goods and services for base operations. Clothing, small weapons, and construction services are just a few of the items commonly purchased using contracts generated by SPS. With built-in software functions allowing users to easily call up information on vendors they've used in the past and catch discrepancies between funds requested and funds available, the system has, in many cases, done its part to reduce PALT (Procurement Administrative Lead Time) or the time between the request for an order and when the action is placed on the award.

Besides reducing PALT, SPS has left its mark on the U.S. Army as it has continued to streamline business practices across the DOD. Most significantly, the system has greatly moved the Army forward in meeting DoD's goal to reduce paper transactions and move toward paperless acquisition. The system's ability to submit forms electronically across services and branches allows contracts to change hands and move through the procurement chain without ever touching paper. In addition to reducing paper, the system has brought with it a new measure of data accuracy and integrity —when numbers don't match up, the system alerts the user, preventing both inaccurate

documentation, and time spent re-working and re-filing forms. As the system continues to grow and mature, it has the potential to save the Army a great deal in resources from lost time and corrective paperwork.

Along with its many benefits, SPS, as with any large software implementation, has not come without its challenges. Frequent system upgrades, changing technology, and a changing external environment have all intervened to challenge Army users just getting to know a new system. With each new security measure enacted in the wake of 9/11 and Operation Iraqi Freedom, SPS has had to change and upgrade its software to meet new requirements and provide extra layers of data security. While these changes have largely contributed to the overall improvement of the technology, they have required users to constantly adapt to a changing software environment.

Training

To help users adjust to this changing system, the SPS JPMO has converted its in-classroom training into a DVD that users can watch at their own pace. Two of the courses cover the basics in performing contracting using the SPS software—"How do I create the contract document?"—while two more give those users training to become system administrators a more technical course of study—"How do I keep the software running?"

Your Desk Officer

Also available to help Army users and take suggestions directly to those responsible for developing the SPS software, is Army Desk Officer George Chavis. With 13 years in the contracting world and six years working with SPS, George is uniquely situated to talk users through specific processes in the software, as well as to relay bugs in the system when they are found. "My job is to coordinate—be a liaison between the Army and [SPS Program Manager] Colonel Peach. When a user in the field has a problem, he can tell me and I act as his advocate to get the software corrected," says Chavis.

For right now, SPS is only in use in Army base operations, while major weapons systems contracting is performed using PADDS—Procurement Automated Data and Document System. With future versions of the software, however, the Army hopes to migrate major weapons systems contracting over to SPS —bringing DoD one step closer to its vision of a truly standardized procurement system, in use across services, branches, departments, and units.

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Date/Location: July 18–19, 2006/Westin Arlington Hotel, Arlington, VA

Overview: Leaders in the procurement and acquisition fields will teach you to develop and implement the best approaches to becoming mission ready. Topics range from "Lessons Learned in Iraq and Afghanistan" to "Change Management."

Information/Registration: http://www.wbresearch.com/adaptusa/index.html

Additional Benefit: 8 CLPs

Second Annual System of Systems Engineering Conference, Organization System of Systems: Developing, Managing, and Operating

Date/Location: July 25–26, 2006/Fort Belvoir, VA

Overview: This is an interactive forum to discuss the implication of Systems of Systems (SoS) in today's environment.

Information/Registration: https://www.sosece.org

Teaming Environment for Acquisition Managers

Date/Location: August 8–10, 2006/Air Force Institute of Technology, Wright Patterson AFB, OH

Overview: Provides acquisition, program, finance, project, and contract managers with conflict resolution skills through a variety of proven approaches.

Information/Registration: http://www.afit.edu

Additional Benefit: 16 CLPs *(Frank, right above it says "20")*

Modeling & Simulation for Acquisition Professional

Date/Location: August 22–24, 2006/NAVSEA, Newport, RI

Overview: This course discusses general modeling and simulation terms, concepts, applications, resources, and policy.

Information/Registration: https://www.atrrs.army.mil

Additional Benefit: 24 CLPs

Lunch-N-Learn PMA Series GS-11 to SES: What Leaders Need to Know About Performance-Based Acquisition

Date/Location: August 28, 2006/USDA South Building, Washington, DC

Overview: Discusses PBA (formerly Performance Based Contracting) highlights and how PBA can benefit from using PWS and SOOs.

Information/Registration: http://intranet.ncmahq.org/lunchnlearn

Additional Benefit: No cost

Contracting Officer Representative (COR) Refresher

Date/Location: August 29, 2006/SPAWAR, San Diego, CA

Overview: This review course provides the latest information   for the Contracting Officer's (Technical) Representative (COR/COTR), Task Administrator, Cognizant Technical Officer (CTO), Quality Assurance Evaluator (QAE), or other contractor oversight positions. Topics include laws and regulations to integrity and ethics issues.

Information/Registration: https://www.atrrs.army.mil

Additional Benefit: 8 CLPs

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Desk Officer Profiles

The Desk Officers of the SPS "serve as the liaisons between the SPS Joint Program Management Office (JPMO), the SPS user community, and Department of Defense (DoD) acquisition leaders." Translation… The Desk Officers represent YOU, your needs and your interests. Take a moment to learn more about George, Bart and Roger, and what they think the future holds for SPS.

Mr. George Chavis-U.S. Army
How many years have you been an SPS Desk Officer? How many years have you been in the procurement world?

I have been in the contracting career field since June 1993; I have been in the role of "Desk Officer" since October 2000.

What would you say your greatest accomplishment or proudest moment has been as an SPS Desk Officer?

I'm not sure I'd apply the word "greatest" to anything that I've tried to do while in this role, but the most significant action I've accomplished is the upgrade of the Army's SPS contracting activities from the Increment 1 version of the PD2 software, to the Increment 2 version. There are still operational issues to overcome before we can declare "victory," but getting to the point of having all Army databases upgraded under the "self-upgrade" approach is notable, at least in my opinion.

How do you see the future of SPS in your Service or Agency?

With the dramatic technical and functional changes forthcoming with the implementation of Increment 3, it is clear that the Standard Procurement System has not yet come into its own. There still remains a large amount of functional improvement and user acceptance to achieve.   Consolidation of operations (servers) will be the biggest challenge the Army will face with SPS, and with the dual-track challenges of implementing a new version of the software (Increment 3), coupled with potential operational challenges resulting from a consolidation, initial, short-term performance is bound to impact mission success—clearly, the near to mid-term future of SPS in the Army will be rocky. As the software matures and business processes become more comfortable and stable, a younger, IT-savvy Army workforce will eventually be able to achieve mission improvement. In order to reach this point, however, the program must overcome long-standing hurdles such as software flaws, user satisfaction, and ease of use. These challenges will require focused attention by both the Program Manager and the user community, but I believe success is achievable.

Do you believe SPS will play a significant role in improving business processes?

In my opinion, business practices should never be built around the architecture of software. Instead, however, software solutions such as SPS must be pliable and adaptable to ever-changing business philosophies and approaches. Software like SPS will absolutely be a contributor to an organization's ability to achieve its mission goals (or not), but I do not personally see SPS, specifically, "improving" business processes. I do, however, envision SPS itself becoming "self-improving" as business processes evolve.

Do you have any advice for those using the SPS system?

Do not become stagnant in "old think" or too enamored with the here and now. A standardized procurement system, and its eventual successor, is here to stay—accept it! We will not go back to the "good old days." Give the software a chance by doing what's necessary to improve yourself and the business practices SPS supports through training and retraining. Automated systems can be unforgiving, so don't "short-cut" yourself into trouble. To quote *Star Trek*: "Resistance is futile!

Bart Becknel-U.S. Air Force

How many years have you been an SPS Desk Officer? How many years have you been in the procurement world?

I have been an SPS Desk Officer for a week and a half.   I have been in the procurement world as related to information systems approximately eight years and total time in procurement about 22 years.

What would you say your greatest accomplishment or proudest moment has been as an SPS Desk Officer?

At this point in time, I would say helping my Component achieve a smooth upgrade to PD2 Version 4.2 Increment 2.

How do you see the future of SPS in your Service or Agency?

SPS will be the anchor for the procurement community.

Do you believe SPS will play a significant role in improving business processes?

Yes, as current technologies improve and newer technologies are realized, SPS will move with these technologies and therefore it will improve, and in turn improve the business processes.

Roger Berger-Defense Contract Management Agency

How many years have you been an SPS Desk Officer? How many years have you been in the procurement world?

I've been a Desk Officer for five years, and have been in procurement nearly 25 years.

What would you say your greatest accomplishment or proudest moment has been as an SPS Desk Officer?

While the whole of the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) is not deployed, there is a small portion of the agency that is deployed. I've helped and supported the agency group who are currently using SPS, acting as their liaison whenever needed.

How do you see the future of SPS in your Service or Agency?

The portion of our agency using SPS will continue to use the system, and we'll be helping them to continue to make using the software easier.

Do you believe SPS will play a significant role in improving business processes?

Yes.

Do you have any advice for those using the SPS system?

Flexibility. Be flexible—the business of the procurement world is being transformed. There are certain things the system can do, but be flexible in how you do things and in how you think about things.

Click here to send your SPS-related comments, questions or issues to the SPS Desk Officers.

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